

2006 Public Policy Summit on Politics and Religion Speakers' Bios

DIANA L. ECK

Professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies
Fredric Wertham Professor of Law and Psychiatry in Society
Director, The Pluralism Project
Harvard University

Diana L. Eck is Professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies at Harvard University where she serves on the Committee on the Study of Religion in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. She is also a member of the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies as well as the Faculty of Divinity. She received her B.A. from Smith College (1967) in Religion, her M.A. from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London (1968) in South Asian History, and her Ph.D. from Harvard University (1976) in the Comparative Study of Religion. Diana Eck and her partner Dorothy Austin are currently serving as Masters of Lowell House at Harvard.

Professor Eck's work on India includes the books *Banaras, City of Light* (Knopf 1982) and *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (Anima 1981; Columbia University Press 1996). With Devaki Jain she edited *Speaking of Faith: Global Perspectives on Women, Religion, and Social Change*, a book which emerged from a jointly planned interfaith women's conference. With Francoise Mallison, she edited *Devotion Divine: Bhakti Traditions from the Regions of India*, essays honoring the French Indology scholar Charlotte Vaudeville.

Diana Eck's book, *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras* (Beacon Press 1993), studies the question of religious difference in the context of Christian theology and the comparative study of religion. It addresses issues of Christian faith in a world of many faiths and, more broadly, the issues of religious diversity that challenge people of every faith. *Encountering God* won the 1994 Melcher Book Award of the Unitarian Universalist Association and the 1995 Louisville Grawemeyer Book Award in Religion, given for work that reflects a significant breakthrough in our understanding of religion.

Since 1991, Diana Eck has been heading a research team at Harvard University to explore the new religious diversity of the United States and its meaning for the American pluralist experiment. The Pluralism Project, funded by the Lilly Endowment, the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Ford Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation, has been documenting the growing presence of the Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Jain, and Zoroastrian communities in the U.S. This research project has involved students and professors in "hometown" research on America's new religious landscape. In 1994, Diana Eck and the Pluralism Project published *World Religions in Boston, A Guide to Communities and Resources*, which introduces the religious traditions and communities of Boston -- from Native Americans, Christians, and Jews to Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, and Zoroastrians. The Pluralism Project's interactive CD-ROM, *On*

Common Ground: World Religions in America, a multimedia introduction to the world's religions in the American context, was published in 1997 by Columbia University Press. It has won major awards from Media & Methods, EdPress, and Educom. Her new book, *A New Religious America* (Harper San Francisco 2001) addresses the challenges for the United States of the new religious diversity that is now ours.

In 1996, Diana Eck was appointed to a U.S. State Department Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad, a twenty-member commission charged with advising the Secretary of State on enhancing and protecting religious freedom in the overall context of human rights. In 1998, Eck received the National Humanities Medal from President Clinton and the National Endowment for the Humanities for her work on American religious pluralism.